

REAL EXPERIENCES REAL OUTCOMES



Exploring student entrepreneurship &
project based learning experiences

JULY - DECEMBER 2024

Keenan Center Report





The Keenan Center for Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Creativity is focused on integrating an entrepreneurial mindset into curriculum and business practices across Central New York. Named for Tim and Kathleen (Fehlan) Keenan '81, it seeks to advance the economy by utilizing personal enterprise to promote economic development and combat poverty. The Center elevates the profile of both Le Moyne College and the Madden College of Business and Economics in the regional and global marketplace and plays a critical role in the upstate New York entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Cover photo: Stephanie and Isaac Budmen, leaders of the Keenan Project Based Learning team, hosted the “Real Experiences, Real Outcomes” panel at the Collaborative Educators Summit, where four Le Moyne student entrepreneurs (Iris Shad '25, Jon LaDuca '25, Celestin Abwe '22, and Payton Hirsch '26) shared how project-based learning and real-world experiences are shaping their futures. Highlighting the summit’s theme of “Future Proofing Students,” the student panel inspired 250 educators from across New York to embrace hands-on, innovative approaches to teaching and learning.



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Letter from the Director

The Keenan Center's impact continues to deepen as it becomes more rooted into Central New York.

The various efforts sampled in this report work to illustrate the Keenan Center's approach to seeding, feeding, and growing communities in a post-industrial age. Central New York's economic ecosystem is starting to grow, but it's in an early stage of revitalization and still emerging after decades of decline. This report is an in-depth dive into the transformative impact of the Keenan team across youth, college-aged students, recent graduates, and emerging entrepreneurial communities in Central New York.

The newly launched Keenan Innovators Program is seeding the future of Central New York with curious, empowered, and can-do youth. This program is growing rapidly and includes the ongoing development of an additional team of Keenan Coaches, who are some of the most energetic and talented educators in Central New York. The novel approach of the Keenan Coaches powerfully

illustrates how to operationalize education in a post-industrial age and the ingenuity of these Innovators shines a bright light on the future of Central New York that they will help to build.

The Keenan team's approach to entrepreneurship continues to be focused on **directly feeding the community of Central New York with graduates who are well on their way to a lifelong journey of entrepreneurship, intrapreneurship, and value creation.**

The mindset of these emerging entrepreneurs is contagious and a proven source of inspiration for the entire Central New York community. This effort includes our ongoing partnership with the Good Life Youth Foundation and outcomes that further illustrate the transformative power that an entrepreneurial mindset can have on a community.

The Maker efforts at the Keenan Center continue to sprout new and innovative ways of growing the economic value of Central New York. The outcomes of our collaborations across the drone community are illustrative of what happens when one space enables the can-do of Makers to regularly intersect with the mindsets of entrepreneurs. One result of these regular



collisions is the Keenan Center becoming an influential hub in the burgeoning drone ecosystem.

The Keenan Center continues to explore new approaches to solving timely problems. **The emergent result is a functional space, a highly collaborative place, and a community of people actively working to shape our future.**

Our doors are open, and we look forward to seeing you soon!

Mike D'Eredita '92
Director

INTRODUCTION

Keenan Team

The Keenan Center has ignited a passion and commitment to entrepreneurship in CNY thanks to creative and innovative minds behind all of our strategic partnerships, cutting-edge programs, and collaborative relationships. The Keenan team continues to expand our network and reach in CNY and beyond.



MIKE D'EREDITA

Director



JAMES SHOMAR

Associate Director



DOUG HILL

Founder and Director
Le Moyne Maker Institute



ISAAC BUDMEN

Designer of Educational
Programming and Mentorship



STEPHANIE BUDMEN

Designer of Educational
Content and Programming



JACKI BOULTER

Project Manager
Grants Liaison



MATT READ

Professor of Practice
Marketing



HASAN STEPHENS

Entrepreneur-in-Residence

INTRODUCTION

Keenan in the News

In the last year, the Keenan Center has appeared in seven newspaper articles, four of which made the front page.

A go-to source for many local media outlets, the Keenan team has provided insights on topics ranging from the innovation economy to creative educational approaches to strategies for retaining entrepreneurs and creatives in CNY.

Most recently, Keenan's Doug Hill and Isaac and Stephanie Budmen were featured in **Syracuse.com's "On Leadership"** column, which spotlights local leaders and highlights their unique views on the area, their work, and their approach to inspiring others.

Early in the year, **PBS's 'On the Money'** featured the Center and credited it for fostering the resurgence of entrepreneurship in CNY. Keenan-specific programs, like the **Innovators Program** and **Maker Faire**, were profiled for their growth and action in CNY.

The Keenan Center's newly created newsletter is also now regularly distributed to over 500 of CNY's most active community members, which keeps all collaborators and partners informed about the Center's ongoing progress and achievements.

Scan the QR code to watch PBS's 'On the Money' featuring the Keenan Center.



Scan the QR codes to read the full articles



KPIs AND METRICS

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

As we continue to drive innovation and foster entrepreneurial growth, the following Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) provide insight into the Keenan Center's impact, engagement, and progress toward our strategic goals.

NAME	DESCRIPTION	JAN 2024	JULY 2024	JAN 2025
ENTREPRENEURSHIP				
Entrepreneurial Activity	Total number of entrepreneurs and/or investors from the local or regional ecosystems engaged for this time period. These include meetings, coaching sessions, small group networking, introductions, etc.	64	140	127
Dolphin Tank Outcomes	Dollars raised and/or earned by Dolphin Tank teams, compounded to date since Spring 2019.	\$1.9 M	\$2.5 M	\$3.0 M
Event Attendance	The number of people who attended Keenan Center organized and sponsored events for this period.	78	1,422	876
Corporate Sponsors	Annual number of dollars donated by corporate sponsors.	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
CRM Entities	Total number of people and entities from the community tracked and logged in the CRM system from October 2023 to date. Data is captured upon entering the Keenan Center. Repeat visits are not included.	127	333	579
EDUCATION				
Student Enrollment and Programming	Total enrollment in ENI202, ENI203, ENI210, ENI311, ENI312 and the number of Keenan Center Workstudies.	65	76	44
STEAM Programming Hours	Total number of STEAM programming hours delivered during this time period.	4,513	1,043	3,524
STEAM Students	Total number of students across programs for this time period.	353	586	146
STEAM Programming Hours for Coaches	Total number of "coaching-the-coaches" programming hours delivered during this time period.	244	51	86
STEAM Coaches	Total number of participant coaches across programs for this time period.	59	27	6
Drone Hours	Total number of drone programming hours for this time period.		654	550
Drone Students	Total number of student participants for this time period.		25	45
Program Participation (Excluding Undergrads)	Total number of coach and student programming hours delivered. This is the grand total of student hours of engagement on individual basis added across the total population of student and coaches.	4,757	1,748	4,160
MAKER INSTITUTE				
Income from Prototyping	Number of dollars generated from community-facing prototyping services for this period.	\$1,175	\$1,500	\$2,004
Number of Maker Projects	Number of projects completed or in progress within the Maker Space for this time period.	45	60	225

KPIs AND METRICS

Dolphin Tank Metrics

Dolphin Tank allows 10 student entrepreneurs to present their businesses to 10 sponsors, who each donate \$5,000 to the total award amount for the event. Since its inception, these teams have collectively generated approximately \$3.0 million in revenues from a total award amount of \$265,000. Of these entrepreneurs, 39 have built businesses that have generated revenues.

Total funds distributed to date

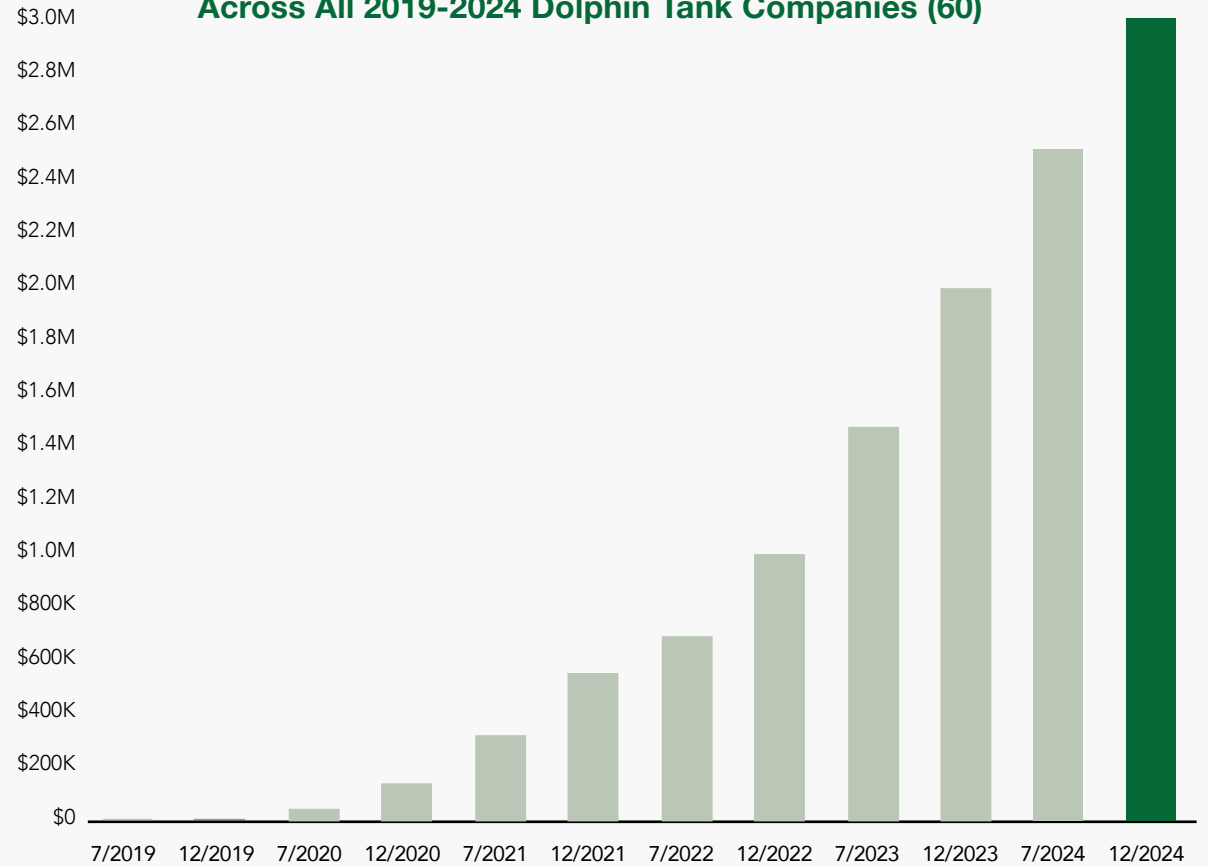
\$265K

Companies that reached sales (out of 60)

39

\$1000–\$700K+
Current range of annual revenues

**Approximate Total Revenue Generated (Cumulative)
Across All 2019-2024 Dolphin Tank Companies (60)**



Dolphin Tank winners have raised or earned, through sales, investment, or sale of a company,

\$3.0M (cumulatively) to date.

**GROWTH OF KEENAN ENTREPRENEURS
IN CNY AND BEYOND**

BUILD IT

ENTREPRENEURS	INNOVATORS	CREATORS	INTRAPRENEURS
EXPLORERS SEEKING A VIABLE PLACE TO START	VISIONARIES DRIVING WIDELY ADOPTABLE SOLUTIONS	INVENTORS CRAFTING IDEAS & MAKING THE FUTURE	INSTIGATORS SOLVING BIG PROBLEMS FROM WITHIN

Media outlets, collaborators, and strategic partners have credited the Keenan Center with playing a major part in the rebirth of entrepreneurship in CNY. But what makes the Keenan approach to fostering entrepreneurship so effective? Seven student entrepreneurs provide updates on their businesses and talk about how Keenan's unique mentorship and support set them up for success.

GROWTH OF KEENAN ENTREPRENEURS IN CNY AND BEYOND

On Ramping to the Lifelong Journey of Entrepreneurship

A cornhole board business, an LGBTQ+-friendly tattoo shop, a delivery service, a video-based marketing firm, a luxury esthetician service, and two streetwear clothing lines.

The day-to-day challenges, goals, and customers are different, but the Keenan Center coaching of the business owners is the same. **For Keenan, it's about the person and their lifelong entrepreneurial journey, not only their current effort to launch a business. The ultimate goal is to empower students with an entrepreneurial and adaptive mindset across a lifetime.**

"I get bogged down by operations," Jack Sommers of JPS Holdings admits. "But my Keenan Center coaches help me step back and see the big picture."

Over and over again, students acknowledged the impact of the practical Keenan Center coaching.

After earning funding to pursue an LGBTQ+ safe space tattoo business, Emily Adams faced

pushback from traditional shops because she is self-taught. Her Keenan Center coach, Professor Matt Read, helps her stay motivated.

"He's honest. If he thinks I'm doing something I shouldn't be, he'll tell me. But he's not pushy."

"Entrepreneurship is very lonely," Celestin Abwe of Clutch Delivery says. "You need a circle of people like the Keenan Center to have honest conversations with because doubt is part of it."

Students credit the success of their Keenan relationships to regular coffee check-ins with James Shomar, business model coaching, and total acceptance of their situations.

"James encouraged me from early on to just try something," Caden Ackerman of Keep on Adapting says. "If it doesn't work, try something else."

"They've shown me that the money will come when you are actually passionate about what you do," Anahja DeLee of Skyla Esthetics says.

"The Keenan Center has helped me take a step back and consider, what do I want to do with this clothing business?" says SectionAide's Kyree Boatman.

"The experience has been amazing," says Brielle Jennings of Bandz Streetwear. "They provided us workshops, and we all got to know our competitors."

Though the stories of Sommers, Adams, Abwe, Ackerman, DeLee, Boatman, and Jennings are very different, they exemplify the Keenan Center's long-term investment in a person's development.



Keenan Center's Professor Matt Read talks entrepreneurship with students.

GROWTH OF KEENAN ENTREPRENEURS IN CNY AND BEYOND

Jack Sommers: JPS Holdings

Jack Sommers' cornhole board business exploded during the pandemic.

"People wanted something to play at home, and they had extra money, so sales rose."

During his freshman year at Le Moyne, Sommers earned \$12,000 from the Dolphin Tank, which allowed him to build a website and improve efficiency.

More recently, Sommers started another business, Swimply The Best, which specializes in pool cleaning. So what do cornhole boards and pool mechanics have in common?

This spring, Sommers returned to Dolphin Tank and earned \$8,500 for his vision of the future: JPS Holdings.

With guidance from the Keenan Center, Sommers created a business plan to develop a holding company with multiple blue-collar or trade-based businesses.

"I want to make acquisitions of family-based companies who have a reputation in the

community and have owners who want to move or retire," Sommers says. "I'll make the back end more efficient and still have a family feel."

Sommers' commitment to his work is personal. He lost his dad in 2015 to pancreatic cancer, which influenced his work. Sommers says his woodworking hobby, something they did together, emerged after his dad's passing, almost as a coping outlet. His mom recognized the importance of this tinkering and gave him freedom in the garage.

In addition to his parents, Sommers credits his uncle, a general contractor, and his cousin, who trusted him with a remodel of her house, for building not only his skills, but his confidence.

"I don't know why she picked me, but she gave me a chance," Sommers says in gratitude to his cousin. "I learned a lot during those house projects."

His cousin's choice wasn't random. Like everyone who works with him, she recognized **Jack's strong family values, unwavering work ethic, and dedication to delivering for his customers.**

CURRENT STUDENTS



"If I hadn't been meeting with the Keenan team, I might not have ever expanded nationally," Sommers says. "Shipping was a big hurdle, but the funding and guidance from the Keenan Center made it possible."

Emily Adams: Tatted Cat

From age 3, Emily Adams was always covered in temporary tattoos.

She got her first real tattoo on her 18th birthday, but it wasn't the best experience.

"It was intimidating between the music, lighting, and overall vibe," she admits. "But I didn't feel comfortable asking him to change anything."

Adams added an entrepreneurship minor after three semesters as a biochemistry major at Le Moyne, a choice that would change her trajectory. In Mike D'Eredita and Doug Hill's class, Adams was encouraged to consider Dolphin Tank.

"I wanted to have a tattoo business, but they emphasized how I should find a problem and pitch a solution," Adams says.

She considered her first tattoo experience. Her idea evolved into a tattoo safe space for women and the LGBTQ+ community.

Adams felt a personal connection to her concept as someone who identifies as a bi-sexual. **She has now participated in**

Dolphin Tank twice—in 2023 and 2024—earning a total of \$8,750.

But Adams soon faced a major unexpected challenge in the tattoo business: gatekeeping.

"When you walk into a shop looking for a job, you hear 'no' over and over again. So, I did it myself, which is looked down upon," Adams explains. "When I say I'm self-taught, they lose interest."

Adams graduates in May, and Keenan Center's Matt Read is helping her strategize how to fully establish her business.

Although she has found it challenging to emerge as a new tattoo artist, it's her commitment to the community and art that will sustain her work. **She says a goal of hers is to continue to cultivate a safe space not only for clients but also for future employees.**

"When I start hiring artists, I don't want them to feel like it's gatekeeping. I want it to be open for them."

A true example of paying it forward.



"I have someone at the Keenan Center to go to for everything. If it's more of a client issue, I'll go to Matt [Read]. If it's a question about how to spend my money, I'll go to James [Shomar]. I have friends who work at the Center who help me make posters."

Celestin Abwe: Clutch Delivery

Last March, Syracuse.com profiled local entrepreneurs, including Celestin Abwe, who has emerged as a local example of perseverance.

Abwe grew up in the war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo, where he helped his mom at the market. When his family fled in the early 2000s as refugees to Kenya, he sold his mom's homemade soap and food on the side of the road. Abwe's family then emigrated to Buffalo in 2009, and he enrolled in Le Moyne in 2019.

During a snowy night in his first year, he wished he could order from the dining hall—where he could use his meal plan—and get it delivered. This idea would become Clutch Delivery, LLC—an on-campus food delivery service delivering directly to residence halls.

Abwe developed a business plan during the COVID shutdown and reached out to Mike D'Eredita on a whim. When he

returned to campus, Abwe started taking D'Eredita's classes.

Abwe went on to earn funding from the Dolphin Tank a couple of times.

In 2023, Clutch was one of five businesses selected by CenterState CEO for the Syracuse Surge Accelerator program, a one-year, in-person accelerator that supports BIPOC entrepreneurs with tech-related start-ups in Syracuse. The program helped Clutch build its apps for its users and restaurants.

Today, Abwe is going through another accelerator program in Buffalo, Launch NY, helping him raise the money to scale.

Committed to Syracuse's growth and vibrancy, Abwe recently met with Mayor Ben Walsh, another big supporter.

"Not a lot of people can say they have a relationship with the mayor," Abwe says. "You get that in Syracuse, but it all stemmed from the Keenan Center. I told Mayor Walsh, 'This is where we want to be.'"



“Entrepreneurship is very lonely. You need a circle of people to be able to have honest conversations because your doubt is part of it,” Abwe says.

Caden Ackerman: Keep on Adapting

When he was a kid, Caden Ackerman's neighbor, who regularly hit golf balls into his field, hired Ackerman to gather and clean them.

"He paid me 10¢ for each cleaned ball," Ackerman says. "It felt significant, and it instilled a sense of reward for effort."

Later, as he entered college, Ackerman started an online custom wood shelving business, using his parents' workshop and shipping nationally through Etsy. It was successful enough that he gained confidence in his business acumen, but Ackerman realized it wasn't his passion.

"I wasn't the biggest fan of the actual building part. But I thought, why can't I leverage social media and digital paid ads for other businesses?"

Ackerman didn't know exactly what he wanted to target, so he started talking to local businesses.

"I drove around and asked, 'what would be beneficial to you?'"

He started small and had only one to two paying customers with his barely established marketing and advertising business, Keep on Adapting, when Ackerman became the second highest earner, with \$9,000, at the 2021 Dolphin Tank.

The win gave Ackerman much more than just the money. "All these people were like, go out and try to build something."

And he did. Ackerman is now on the verge of hiring his first full-time employee.

"I know I'm in a transition from an operator into a true manager entrepreneur. But I want to make sure the service we're providing is super high quality as well as the relationships, so it's about being able to delegate."

From golf balls to shelving to marketing solutions, Ackerman's greatest strengths continue to emerge: he often reflects on what works and what doesn't and what his goals are. One might say he's a pro at adapting.



"I actually wanted to be an inventor," Ackerman says. "But when I was in high school, I realized inventors are either engineers or entrepreneurs or both."

Anahja DeLee: Skyla Esthetics

Anahja DeLee just celebrated a big milestone.

This November, DeLee relocated to the Washington, D.C., area and is looking for a second storefront for Skyla Esthetics, her online beauty supply business specializing in supplies for lash artists. Her first one is in downtown Syracuse.

“One of my main goals was to expand outside of Central New York,” says DeLee. “A majority of my sales were coming from the D.C. area. It’s a large market for esthetician services.”

So DeLee took a brave leap, moved, and hopes to be in a new space by early 2025.

DeLee is no stranger to taking a risk. As a senior in the international baccalaureate program at Corcoran High School in 2020, in COVID lockdown, she saw an opportunity to sell strip lashes.

“I ordered the lashes in bulk and sold them off my grandmother’s porch. I also worked for Wegmans. I saved up, bought an old Impala, and started a mobile

lash delivery service.”

DeLee traveled within Syracuse’s city limits and became a regular go-to for local makeup artists.

“I got popular in the city and wanted to get behind the chair. So I started doing training, and I ventured out into selling lash supplies.” She eventually set up her retail and service space in Syracuse.

DeLee was a nursing student at OCM BOCES this spring when she participated in the Good Life Youth Foundations (GLYF)’s Beats, Bars and Business Competition (B3) held at the Keenan Center and earned first place and a spot in the Dolphin Tank competition weeks later.

She went on to be the highest earner of the competition.

DeLee’s journey from her grandmother’s porch to the nation’s capital has been due to her work ethic and passion.

“I always had the vision, but the Keenan Center gave me a platform.”



“The Keenan Center has shown me that the money will come when you actually are really passionate about what you do, and you dedicate yourself to it,” DeLee says.

GROWTH OF KEENAN ENTREPRENEURS IN CNY AND BEYOND

B3 -> DOLPHIN TANK PATHWAY

Kyree Boatman: SectionAide

Kyree Boatman is currently in rebrand mode.

Earlier this year, Boatman participated in the **Good Life Youth Foundations (GLYF)'s Beats, Bars and Business Competition (B3)** held at the Keenan Center. He pitched his street clothing business, SectionAide, securing not only funding, but a chance to compete at the Dolphin Tank.

When he was 17, Boatman's grandmother taught him how to sew. An avid student-athlete, it gave him a focus once he graduated.

"Once I realized basketball wasn't something I wanted to pursue, I found love for the artistry in clothing," Boatman says. "I fell for designing and making clothes. It was a big part of my brand journey."

He started to make his own clothing—hoodies—around 2016 and linked up with GLYF. At this year's Dolphin Tank, Boatman ranked among the top two earners, taking home \$10,200.

But his prize money is in savings right now as

he becomes intentional about his next step.

"I'm good at making designs, but manufacturers can be challenging," Boatman says. "In October I had two samples made, and neither came back how I wanted." SectionAide is primarily known for its patchwork hoodies and unique designs. Its last drop in June sold out in two hours.

"When you have the business model and know what you want to do with the business, you can scale to different levels," Boatman says. "James [Shomar] really helps me understand the business side of it. I know when I text him, he's definitely going to respond."

Boatman notes that the support he's received every step of the way has helped him figure out his brand. He realized, too, that even though the coaches at the Keenan Center weren't experts in clothing brands, their extensive business knowledge, passion, and skills were transferable. He's encouraged by the brand progress he's made, and he's committed to being intentional.



"The Keenan Center has helped me not only with the funding, but with the business information. I know I will look back at what the Keenan team told me, and it will still help me in the future."

Brielle Jennings: Bandz

Brielle Jennings always had a unique sense of style.

When she showed up to high school on her birthday in a unique outfit she designed, her photos—and style—went viral. With 2,000 likes and 1,500 shares quickly appearing on social media, Jennings knew she was onto something.

She started helping friends put outfits together. Then, in 2021, she launched her business, Bandz Streetwear, which features unisex clothing. She began by buying fabric and using a Cricut machine to make her designs. Now, she uses more advanced machines, too, like an embroidery machine and a DTF printer.

For Jennings, though, making clothes and designs became much more than just a business.

“It mentally helped me find myself, and it was something to keep me busy. I lost my mom, and it gave me something to want to continue to be here for,” says Jennings.

Jennings learned that, as it turns out, her mom also used to sew. Sharing this interest has helped inspire her business motivation.

Jennings was working a summer job at the Good Life Youth Foundation (GLYF) when she was overheard talking about her business. Hasan Stephens, Jennings’ mentor and GLYF founder and CEO, encouraged her to participate in the GLYF Beats, Bars and Business (B3) competition. In 2023, she did so, won, and then went on to be the second top earner at the Dolphin Tank.

Today, with the support from her coaches, Jennings continues to expand. She just completed a semester at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York City and is transferring to Syracuse University. She works part-time at Loretto and manages a small shop with her clothing.

What keeps her going with such a busy schedule?

“I remember how far I’ve come,” Jennings says. “And that my mom is looking down on me.”



“My two business mentors introduced me to my first pitch competition. Then more competitions, investments, pop-up shops, networking, fashion shows. It just kept going from there.”

**KEENAN COLLABORATION
IN CENTRAL NEW YORK**



From the visitor paths at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo to the hallways of the Upstate Medical Center's new leadership center at Salt City Market in the heart of Syracuse, the Keenan Center has spent the last six months working closely with many partners in Central New York. Through these fruitful programs, the Keenan Center has brought creativity and inspiration to CNY's pillar institutions while engaging students in inquiry-based learning and real-world experience.

Curious Critter Corners: A Multi-Dimensional Community Solution

This summer, Stephanie and Isaac Budmen led the “Innovation Internship” program at the Keenan Center.

Partnering with ERIE21, they guided 50 high school students from Syracuse Central School District in creating permanent interactive stations called Curious Critter Corners for the Rosamond Gifford Zoo. These stations engage visitors by answering common questions, including: Where are the animals? What is the American Zoological Association accreditation and why does it matter? Are zoos only for children and entertainment? The aim is to engage and educate zoo-goers.

Over a two-week period, the students lived on campus and worked four hours each day under the Budmen’s mentorship. They began by blueprinting their ideas and developing content and then submitted their designs to the zoo for feedback. **The students rapidly iterated their projects to meet the zoo’s needs and, once**

approved, had five days to design, build, execute, and install the Curious Critter Corners. This intensive process emphasized authentic learning, workforce development, and community impact by providing real-world internship experiences with client feedback, quality standards, and strict deadlines.

This project wouldn’t have been possible without Jamie Joseph of ERIE21 and the ERIE21 team, Doug Hill’s assistance as the director of the Maker Institute, and the dedicated talent of the Keenan Center work-study team.

The Curious Critter Corners project is a multi-dimensional community solution. **It not only addressed the Rosamond Gifford Zoo’s needs by providing engaging and educational tools for tens of thousands of visitors each year, but it also equipped students with valuable project management and design skills.** Through their dedication, Stephanie and Isaac Budmen demonstrated the transformative power of inquiry-based learning, fostering creative leaders and making a lasting positive impact on the CNY community.



The Budmens guided students step-by-step from the project’s conception phase to the installation at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo.

KEENAN COLLABORATION
IN CENTRAL NEW YORK

Upstate Mural: Celebrating Innovation and Commitment to Community

This past October, Stephanie and Isaac Budmen designed and installed a five-panel mural for Upstate Medical Center's new leadership center at Salt City Market on behalf of the Keenan Center.

Working closely with Jill Denny, director of hospital strategic affairs, the Budmens immersed themselves in understanding Upstate's significant contributions to the CNY community over the past year.

The mural artfully represents the three pillars of Upstate's excellence: the university, the hospital, and research. The fourth panel highlights the CNY community, showcasing a drone delivering medicine through the streets of Syracuse as a symbol of Upstate and the Keenan Center's shared commitment to innovation. The final panel celebrates the

Keenan Center as a hub of creativity and innovation, reinforcing the strong partnership between Upstate and the Keenan community.

All panels were produced in the Keenan Center's labs and expertly installed by the dedicated work-study team, alongside Stephanie and Isaac Budmen. **This mural not only captivates visually but also educates and inspires, reflecting Upstate's values, innovations, and promising future. It stands as a testament to the collaborative effort and creative vision that drive meaningful community impact.**

The Upstate mural resonates deeply with staff, visitors, and the broader CNY community, showcasing the power of collaboration and creativity in celebrating and enhancing the region's most cherished institutions. **Through this project, Stephanie and Isaac Budmen have demonstrated their commitment to fostering strong community ties and promoting innovation through creative expression.**



The Keenan team captured Upstate's pillars of excellence as well as community partnerships in the mural.



**KEENAN EDUCATION
IN UPSTATE NEW YORK**

The Keenan Center's entrepreneurial coaching and commitment to the community begins with building on-ramps for K-12 youth through innovative STEAM and entrepreneurial programming. Over the last six months, the Keenan Center has been more successful than ever in seeding local communities with entrepreneurial interest, passion, and abilities through Keenan Innovators, the GLYF Bootcamp, and robotics classes. Some programs have even tripled in size.

Keenan Innovators Update

The Keenan Innovators program has rapidly grown into an exciting learning community for middle school students.

Designed for grades 6-8, it introduces inquiry-based learning, allowing students to explore their ideas and figure out how to create self-directed projects like automatic cat food dispensers or Rubik's Cube YouTube channels.

Operating over 12 weeks, the program empowers students to design, develop, and execute their ideas with hands-on support. What began as a small pilot designed and led by James Shomar in Spring 2024 has now expanded to a three-cohort program supported by six dedicated coaches in Fall 2024. These coaches are not just STEAM educators but active entrepreneurs, intrapreneurs, and creators in the Greater CNY Community, and they bring real-world experience to inspire young innovators.

Keenan Innovators matters because it builds essential skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving, preparing students to become future leaders, entrepreneurs, and contributors to any team they are on. The program's growth from one cohort with one coach to a multi-cohort program with a full coaching staff highlights its success and the increasing demand for transformative learning experiences.



Keenan Innovators and Coaches hard at work this fall.

Stephanie and Isaac Budmen's vision, dedication, and practice of authentic learning have been crucial in evolving and growing the program. Looking ahead, Keenan Innovators plans to reach even more students, continuing to ignite their passion

for innovation through inquiry-based learning. With a growing coaching staff and the steadfast leadership of the Budmens, the program is set to inspire the next generation of thinkers and creators.



Ready to Innovate?

Scan the QR code to learn more about the Keenan Innovators program and secure your spot in the next cohort today!

The Keenan Center and the Good Life Youth Foundation: Celebrating Impact Through Partnership

This summer, the Keenan Center proudly partnered with the Good Life Youth Foundation (GLYF) to deliver a transformative experience through the HipHop-preneurship Academy (HHPA) Bootcamp, a dynamic initiative designed to empower youth with entrepreneurial skills and life-changing opportunities.

The HHPA Bootcamp offered a unique platform where participants not only learned the fundamentals of entrepreneurship but also engaged in practical applications that will serve them well in future endeavors. Youth were coached by local entrepreneurs, participated in interactive workshops, and gained firsthand experience managing projects.

During the Bootcamp, the Keenan Center led STEAM programming for 15 youth, showcasing the synergy between science, technology, and creativity.

Highlights included exploring the fascinating concept of creating circuits using human biology and delving into a variety of other hands-on scientific projects. These experiences expanded the participants' understanding of STEAM's relevance in everyday life and its connection to innovative career paths.

This impactful summer program would not have been possible without the generous support of the Allyn Foundation, whose contributions ensured that the HHPA Bootcamp reached and inspired as many youth as possible.

The Keenan Center remains committed to fostering partnerships like this one to drive meaningful community engagement and provide youth with the tools and opportunities to thrive. Together with the GLYF, we are building a brighter future—one empowered young entrepreneur at a time.



GLYF students show off airplanes during the HHPA Bootcamp at the Keenan Center this summer.

HHPA Bootcamp Impact by the Numbers

Total Youth Served

71

Stipends Paid

\$29,375

(rewarding youth for learning and applying entrepreneurial skills)

Gift Cards Distributed

(incentives recognizing high performance)

\$1,450

The Keenan Center Provides New Home for FIRST Tech Challenge Team

For more than 15 years, the CNY Robotics & Science Foundation has sponsored robotics teams in Central New York.

Last year, their high school robotics team, The Suits, FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC) team #10161, coached by Andrew Leary, who also serves as a Keenan Coach, lost their meeting space at a local library—and a dozen team members were threatened with losing their team. **The Keenan Center stepped up and offered the perfect location for the team when they needed it most.**

The FTC team meets weekly at the Keenan Center to design, build, and program a robot that is used to compete in various tournaments throughout New York State.

The students are learning to program the robot using Android-based devices programmed with Java. The programs control motors,

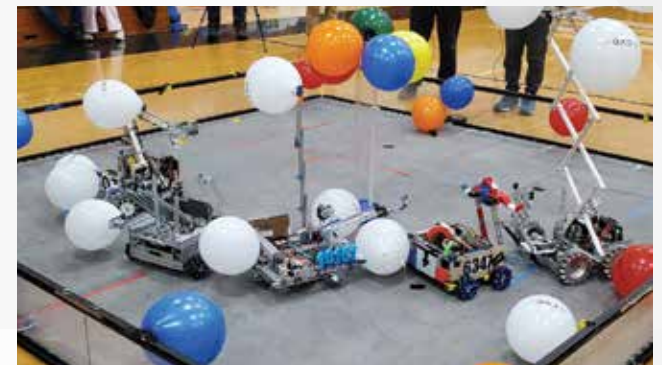
servos, and sensors deliberately placed on the robot for scoring opportunities.

FTC is a competitive, high school-level robotics program spanning more than 32 countries and serving over 85,000 students.

The teams consist of up to 15 students each. The robots compete in a 12-foot by 12-foot playing field with autonomous and driver-controlled periods of scoring.

A typical evening session involves multiple programming sessions, a few building groups, and the need for a large area to practice running the robot. **The move to the Keenan Center has not only allowed members of the community surrounding Le Moyne to join the team, but has allowed the team to use more than just the classroom space.** The convenience of extra tools and 3D printers for custom robot components and game pieces has been invaluable.

The Suits traveled to the Albany area and Corning for tournaments in the final weeks of December.



The Keenan Center provides the FTC team with the appropriate space so they can effectively practice for competitions.



CASE STUDY

Long before “drone” was a common vocabulary word, Syracuse’s industrial leaders and politicians were planting the seeds for a growing drone ecosystem in Central New York. The story is one of perseverance, innovation, and determination of great visionaries. Today, the Keenan Center is a proud and integral partner in the vision and path of the drone economy’s future in Upstate New York, thanks to its innovative drone training and educational programming and unique and creative collaborations.

Upstate NY: “The Center of the Drone Universe”

Over the last 20 years, Upstate New York has quietly emerged as a drone economy leader.

This is thanks not only to Syracuse’s long history in manufacturing sectors but also to the area’s innovative business leaders. This December, **Commercial UAV News** called Upstate the “center of the drone universe,” citing the Keenan Center as an important cog in the machine.

This evolution has been central to the Keenan Center’s mission and efforts. Its commitment to collaboration, access, innovation, and community partnership has strategically positioned the Center and its Maker Space in the now-booming drone ecosystem.

First, the Keenan Center deliberately created drone educational pathways and resources for a city filled with former manufacturers, thanks to its partnership NUAIR. The Center then began a collaboration with GENIUS NY, a startup accelerator sponsored by CenterState CEO and Empire State Development, which brings drone-tech companies to the area in need of trained employees. Although these partnerships on their own have nurtured innovation in their own rights, when viewed as simultaneous collaborations, the more significant impact on the ecosystem emerges.

The following case study demonstrates how the Keenan Center leveraged its Maker Space and activities to become a hub within the drone economy.



The Keenan Center at the table—literally—with local drone leaders and partners NUAIR, NYSTA, MACNY, Liverpool High School, Syracuse City School District, and CNYDRONES. Photo credit: Chelsea Schepp, NUAIR

Scan the QR code to read
“Why Upstate NY is the Center
of the Drone Universe.”



How a Hub in a Drone Ecosystem Is Created



Student Jackson Taunton assists Doug Hill in gathering data from drones for OEI in Tully, NY.

The Keenan Center’s recent OEI Project, NUAIR collaboration, and Genius NY partnerships showcase the Center’s growing value and impact on the drone industry in Central New York and beyond.

This fall, the Onondaga Environmental Institute (OEI), a locally based group committed to advancing environmental research, education, planning, and restoration in Central New York, **commissioned the Keenan Center to create a water table of the Onondaga watershed** for its educational programming in local middle and high schools. Then, the collaboration grew quickly both in impact and reach.

To start, the Keenan team created a digital topographical map and model, which included the appropriate elevation measurements of the

terrain. Using the Center’s milling machine, which automatically decides the drill bits and cutting movements needed, a 3D topographical map was carved out of a large plastic block. When assembled with its pump, drain, and spout, the final table creatively and interactively demonstrates the impact of rising sea levels on the Onondaga watershed.

Throughout the project, OEI explained how underground salt mines are collapsing in the Tully area of the watershed just south of Syracuse. Curious about the impact, **OEI inquired if the Keenan Center could map the area using drones.** Thanks to the Center’s partnership with NUAIR, Doug Hill was equipped to use different drone sensors to provide OEI with a comprehensive topographical overview and data on the state of the watershed. Along with some student support, Hill got to work.

The findings proved relevant to the OEI: the drone footage revealed freshwater being mixed with

Continued on next page.

“Ten percent of a drone pilot’s role is actually flying. It’s more about the data analysis, interpreting the data, and using computer systems to make the data meaningful.”

CASE STUDY



Keenan’s Doug Hill showcasing the Maker Space to a GENIUS NY team was featured in a video presented at the opening of the 2024 GENIUS NY competition: “Almost every day is filled with different experts in different fields.”

Cont’d.

sediment coming up from the old salt mines. **Thanks to the drones’ infrared technology, Hill and his team could help OEI identify where the water was coming from.** OEI was in the process of considering a new dam for the area, and this data directly impacted the decision.

Partnerships like OEI not only illustrate the Keenan Center’s continued commitment to the growth of the drone industry but also help establish the Center as a hub in the ever-expanding drone ecosystem of Upstate New York.

The NUAIR and Keenan Center’s comprehensive drone training programs also continue to position the Center as a vital resource and educational leader within the industry. With approximately 45 students currently enrolled, including 20 students in the entry-level Part 107 course working on their drone pilot license, the program continues to expand and demonstrate its value.

But, as Doug Hill points out: “Ten percent of a drone pilot’s role is actually flying. It’s more about the data analysis, interpreting the data, and using

computer systems to make the data meaningful.”

To this end, Doug Hill and the Keenan Center are forging a partnership with GENIUS NY, which brings five drone companies to New York and gives them \$500,000 to establish a year-long incubator program and generate jobs in Syracuse. One team ultimately gets another \$500,000 through a pitching competition.

The Keenan Center has already directly helped drone companies with prototyping, pitch preparation for the competition, business coaching, and even supplied them with can-do and ready-for-market talent.

As a leader in this space, the Keenan Center is working to create a pipeline of employment opportunities for graduates from the Keenan Center’s drone program, solidifying its role as a workforce development leader in this sector. **On a larger scale, these collaborations demonstrate the significant impact of the Keenan Center’s simultaneous positioning as a node in the CNY drone ecosystem as well as a node in Upstate New York’s innovation network.**

CONCLUSION

The Keenan Center's Impact Continues to Deepen

As these efforts grow in both impact and depth, the Keenan Center is forging a pathway for others to follow. It is creating a repeatable and scalable model for stimulating entrepreneurship, innovation, and creativity in a post-industrial era.

Thank you, Tim and Kate (Fehlan) Keenan '81, for your continued support of our Center.

While we work to inspire a new generation of entrepreneurs, innovators, and creators, we are energized by you and your commitment to the vision of the Keenan Center.



CONCLUSION

Keenan Community Collaborators

Our relationships with various community organizations amplify the Keenan Center's overall impact. We look forward to growing and strengthening our collaborations, which have already yielded incredible results.

We are grateful for the continued efforts of our 70+ Keenan Community Collaborators

Agri-Trak	Good Life Youth Foundation	Musical Theater Incubator (VPA at LMC)
Aloft	Greenjets	NUAIR
Antigua Tourism Board*	Hub Cub Scouts - Syracuse	Onondaga Central School District
ARISE Adaptive Design	Impel	Onondaga Community College (OCC)
Association of Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International (AUVSI)	Indium Corporation	Onondaga County Public Library (OCPL)*
Bank of America*	Ithaca Generator*	Onondaga Environmental Institute*
BlueFlite	InteliEQ*	Onondaga - Cortland - Madison Counties Board of Cooperative Educational Services (OCM BOCES)
BNY Mellon	Involi SA*	The Public Broadcasting of CNY (WCNY)
Boys & Girls Club of Syracuse	Jamesville-DeWitt Central School District	Rising CNY
CADimensions	Jubilee Homes	Rosamond Gifford Zoo
Centerstate CEO	Keenan Center at Ohio State	Salient
Central New York BioTech Accelerator	Kinney Drugs	Spatchcock Funk*
Clear Path for Veterans	Lafayette School District	Syracuse Surge Accelerator
Clutch Delivery	Leadership Greater Syracuse	Syracuse University Makerspace*
CNY STEM Hub	Le Moyne College Athletics	Switch the Future
Coffeehouse CxO*	Le Moyne College Counseling Center	Syracuse.com
Collaborative Educators Summit 2024	Le Moyne College Maker Zone student club	The HUSTLE Defense Accelerator Program
Constellation Brands	Le Moyne College Manresa Program	The Tech Garden
Cracked Bean Roastery*	Le Moyne College Purcell School Occupational Therapy and Physician Assistant programs	Teddie Eddies
DVC Games*	Le Moyne Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging	UpMobility Foundation
East Syracuse Minoa School District	Liverpool Central School District*	Upstate Medical University
Educating for our Rising Innovation Economy (ERIE21)	Liverpool Public Library	Upward Bound at Le Moyne College
Edward Jones	M&T Bank*	Vergil Ventures
Fayetteville Free Library (FFL)*	Maker Faire Syracuse	VIP Structures
Fayetteville Manlius School District	Modovolo*	Westhill Central School District
Federal Aviation Administration	More Good Jobs	
Federal Bureau of Investigation*		
Flyhound Corporation*		
Genius NY		

*Relationships formed within the past six months

CONCLUSION

Directory

Feel free to reach out directly to any of the students featured in this report for more information about their businesses.

- If you are a company interested in sponsoring the Keenan Center's efforts to inspire and coach more of Central New York's budding entrepreneurs through our proven and practical approach or are looking to support the Keenan Center's mission to educate Central New York's youth through hands-on, inquiry-based learning, please contact **Mike D'Eredita (deredima@lemoyne.edu)** for more details or to inquire about sponsorship opportunities.
- If your company is looking to educate and certify its own team of drone pilots, you would like to become a Part 107 drone pilot, or you would like to explore sponsorship opportunities, contact **Doug Hill (hilldb@lemoyne.edu)**.
- If you're interested in getting involved with our community-focused Keenan Innovators Program, extending impactful learning experiences beyond the classroom and into the broader community, contact **keenanlearning@lemoyne.edu**.
- If you're interested in making a meaningful impact at the 2025 Dolphin Tank, reach out to **James Shomar (shomarja@lemoyne.edu)**. We're currently seeking sponsors for our awards tables at \$5,000 each.



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Keenan Center Report

